

UDOT announces I-15 expansion

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OGDEN -- Weber County will finally see an expansion of Interstate 15 from 31st Street to 12th Street, starting in spring 2006.

And if things fall just right, the work may even extend to 2700 North.

Brent DeYoung, project director, presented information about the \$180 million project Tuesday to the Weber County Commission.

The project will allow for reconstruction of interchanges at 31st, 24th, 21st, and 12th streets. The road will also be widened to four lanes from the Interstate 84 merge to 12th Street.

The project was the subject of heated debate in the 2005 legislative session. There was a \$30 million surplus, which Northern Utah legislators wanted for Weber County. Ultimately, that money was allocated to the Utah County I-15 project.

Sen. Scott Jenkins, R-Plain City, has been watching the project carefully. He serves as the subappropriations chairman on the Transportation Committee.

Jenkins spoke recently with Utah Department of Transportation officials about the Weber expansion project.

"They told me they were doing the best they could to stretch the dollars," he said about going all the way to 2700 North. "We're pushing like crazy to get it through."

Commissioner Ken Bischoff worried about what will happen when the funding runs out.

"Will it just stop wherever the funding runs out, if it's three blocks past 12th or half a mile past 12th?" he asked. "Stopping somewhere in between does not help any."

DeYoung responded he is not confident \$180 million will take the project all the way to 2700 North.

Bischoff and Commissioner Camille Cain pledged their support for pushing the project to 2700 North.

"We will work with you all that we can help to get extra funding," Cain said. "We need to make the Legislature aware that the people here in Northern Utah are very concerned."

By November, UDOT hopes to have a general contractor selected and bids to take to the Legislature to apply for additional funding.

Any additional funding will be used to complete the project north of 12th Street.

Jenkins said he will continue to push for the extra funding.

For now, UDOT's budget of \$180 million may only allow them to go to 12th Street. The problem is that the scope of the project has increased, while the budget has stayed the same.

Many safety and structural deficiencies were not planned on, which has increased the scope of the project and ultimately, the cost. There are a lot of needs through areas of I-15, said DeYoung.

One of those needs is to help the flow of traffic at on- and off-ramps, particularly in the areas of 31st Street and 12th Street. There are higher rates of accidents in those areas than initially thought, DeYoung said.

UDOT is trying to be creative by using a "design-build" format, Jenkins said.

Design-build would allow construction to begin before the design of the new freeway is complete. Selecting this format, UDOT also hopes to finish the project faster, DeYoung said.

Other improvements that will be made include noise walls, overhead message boards, traffic sensors in the pavement and aesthetics.

"We are excited that we are on the calendar finally," Cain said.

For more information, go to www.udot.utah.gov/i15now.